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EDUCATION WEEK

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Education Data Seen Bypassing Disabled Youths

Measures' Reliability Is Called Into Question

By Debra Viadero

WASHINGTON—Between 40 percent and 50 percent of all students with disabilities are excluded from the sampling procedures used in some of the most prominent surveys and assessments used to measure the nation's educational well-being, according to a new study.

Researchers from the National Center for Educational Outcomes at the University of Minnesota, which conducted the study, said the findings raise questions about the reliability of such well-known measures as the National Assessment of Educational Progress and the National Educational Longitudinal Study. By excluding some of the students who have the most trouble learning, the researchers said, such estimates could be painting an overly optimistic picture of educational progress.

The findings come as national efforts to improve education are focusing to a great degree on such measures. The National Educational Goals Panel, for example, has begun producing annual reports on how well the nation and individual states are doing

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Cold War's End Wracks Schools in Base Town

By Mark Pitsch

PORTSMOUTH, N.H.—For the educators, parents, and students of this charming port city, the end of the Cold War has meant not only an epochal shift in world geopolitics, but also a drastic educational upheaval.

Over the last three years, about 150 of the local school district's 600 employees, including 116 teachers, have lost their jobs. The 300 or so teachers who remain are the highest-paid and most senior, so that today the youngest elementary-school teacher in the entire system is 39 years old.

Four elementary schools have been closed, and dozens of students have been reassigned as a result of a controversial redistricting plan. Some of the teachers from the closed schools were able to keep jobs only by unceremoniously "bumping" less senior teachers at other schools.

More than 30 high-school courses have been eliminated, including some advanced foreign-language, gifted-and-talented, and advanced-placement classes. The number of sections available in numerous other subjects has decreased, to the point where one senior planning to study science in college was forced to choose between taking advanced mathematics or physics.

Variously described as "devastating," "horrendous," and "traumatic," these and other jolts to the Portsmouth school system are directly attributable to the March 1991 closing of Pease Air Force Base here and the resulting reduction of the student population by more than 35 percent—from nearly 3,800 in 1988-89 to an estimated 2,500 next year.

The cuts would have been even worse if school officials had not been able to rely on a powerful Congressional ally who managed to win additional federal aid for the district under a little-known provision. The Bush Administration opposes continuation of that emergency aid next year, however, and without it Ports-

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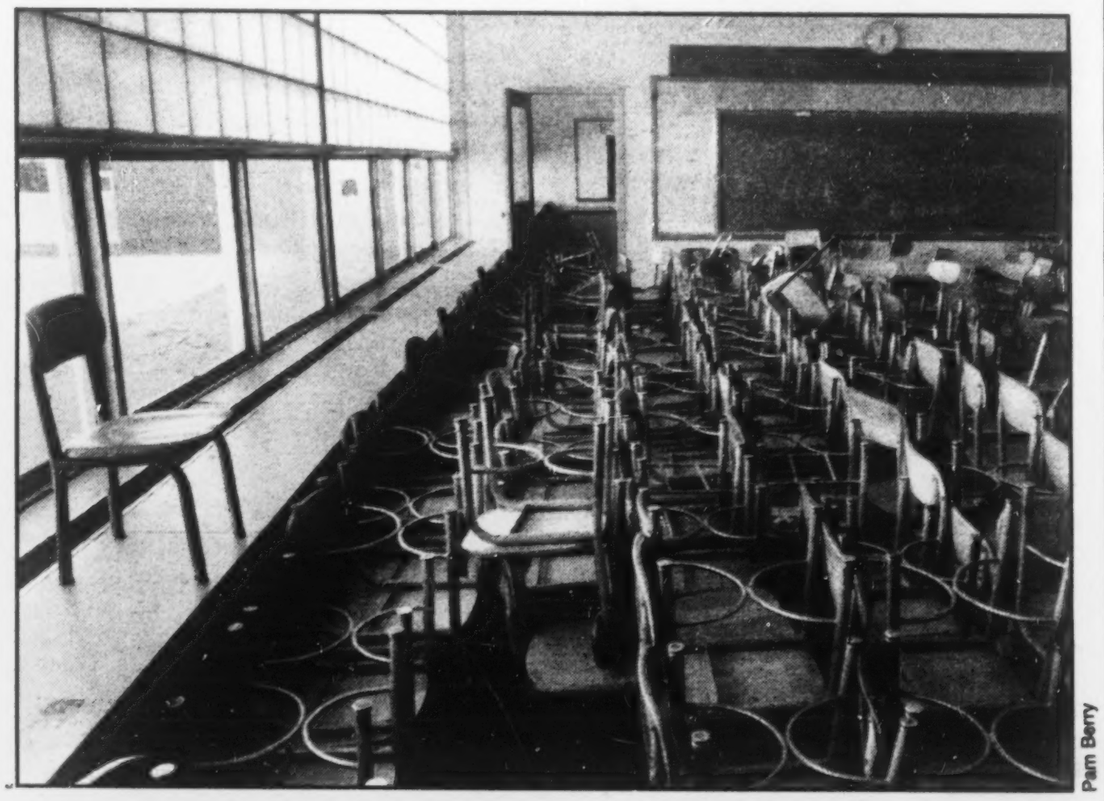

Pam Berry

A classroom in Brackett Elementary School on Pease Air Force Base is used to store hundreds of desk chairs that are being sold for $2 apiece.

Boards of Contention

The embodiment of American democracy, local school boards are coming under attack as defenders of the status quo. While some think the existing system of lay governance is still viable, others would scrap it for an entirely new structure.

"Not only are boards a problem, but they are becoming in some ways superfluous," one critic charges. "We might be better off . . . without the middleman of the board of education."

In a special pullout report, beginning opposite Page 18, *Education Week* examines the role of local lay governance in education and the various proposals for reforming it. The special report was underwritten by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

'Turning Lives Around' Is the Goal Of Burger King-School Partnerships

By Mark Walsh

MIAMI—Business involvement in the public schools is being taken a step further at the Corporate Academy here.

While other companies have "adopted" schools or contributed staff time or money to existing reform efforts, the Burger King Corporation and its partners started from scratch in 1989 and created this alternative school for students at risk of dropping out of the Dade County schools.

That was a welcome development for Edward Carter, now 18 years old, who was frequently skipping school at Ponce de Leon Middle School before he enrolled in the corporate-sponsored program.

"The teachers didn't really care what you did—they were just pushing you through," the young man said of his neighborhood

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Michel Peltier

Jack Annunziata, the director of Miami's Corporate Academy, likes the school's "holistic" approach.

Minneapolis Schools Suspend High-Stakes Kindergarten Testing

By Deborah L. Cohen

Kindergartners will not have to face a familiar rite of passage in Minneapolis this spring: a 20-minute test that could determine whether they enter the 1st grade.

The so-called "benchmark test" was among the first and most widely publicized districtwide efforts to assess a child's readiness for the 1st grade.

Launched in 1984 by the former superintendent of the Minneapolis schools, Richard Green, the test was part of a strategy to reduce the incidence of "social promotion" and to hold schools accountable for results by testing students' "minimum competencies" at various grade levels.

In recent years, however, the test had drawn increasing scrutiny from educators who questioned not only the competencies it measured, but also the wisdom of retaining young children on the basis of test results.

Capping a debate that had been simmmering for several years, the Minneapolis school board voted 6 to 1 last month to suspend the test for at least two years while the district pilots an ambitious set of alternative-assessment strategies.

Evaluators last week began administering

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Also in the news

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A new study finds both benefits and shortcomings in the education experience of 8th graders at Catholic schools.

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The Supreme Court orders a federal appeals court to take another look at desegregation in Topeka, Kan.

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On the Fast Track
Boston University is planning a new private high school that will require students to complete their first year of college work before graduating.
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Advertising Their Opposition
A Florida group that opposes the state's child-welfare policies is running an advertisement accusing state officials of "kidnapping" children whose parents spank or scold them. **Page 5.**

Change the Channel?
A one-year study shows that the Channel One classroom television news show did not significantly increase the current-events knowledge of most high-school student viewers. **Page 8.**

Disabled Women's Plight
A national study suggests that young women with disabilities face more dismal prospects for life after high school than do their male counterparts.
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A Difficult Transition
Despite their higher levels of achievement in 10th grade than in 8th grade, many students may be ill-prepared for the transition to high school, data from a massive federal survey suggest. **Page 9.**

Unseen Language Barrier?
Teachers often do not know when students come from a home where a language other than English is spoken, a recently released federal study concludes.
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State Budgets In Extremis
The health of state budgets continued to decline for the third straight year and year-end balances are expected to near rock bottom, according to a 50-state survey.
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ACROSS THE NATION

STATES

Minnesota Board Issues First Rejection of 'Charter' School

The Minnesota Board of Education has rejected a plan to allow operation of a "charter" school in the town of Rapidan after state officials expressed concerns that the proposal was simply an attempt to prevent a small school from being closed.

The board voted 6 to 2 to kill the proposal. It was the first time the board had disapproved a proposal for one of the new breed of schools authorized last year by the state legislature. The new schools are to be given wide latitude in setting curriculum and hiring and firing staff, and will be free of many state regulations.

In December, the Lake Crystal-Wellcome Memorial School Board voted to close Rapidan Elementary School at the end of this school year because of declining enrollment and a budget shortfall. A group in Rapidan then proposed the school become a "country" school teaching agribusiness to about 70 students in grades K-6.

The Lake Crystal board refused to sponsor the school, but the application was submitted by the nearby Truman district.

Commissioner of Education Gene Mammenga had recommended that the state board reject the proposal, citing the lack of local support for it.

The board previously approved schools in Winona and Toivola-Meadowlands. Under the law, up to eight charters may be granted.

■ **A federal appeals court will not reconsider its ruling that a University of Maryland scholarship program for black students is unconstitutional.**

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit in Richmond, Va., voted 10 to 2 to uphold its reversal of a lower-court ruling. The reversal was made by a three-judge panel, and the university asked that it be reviewed by all 13 members of the appellate court. One judge did not vote on the matter.

The three-member panel said the scholarships would be legal only if the university proved that they remedy existing discrimination at the school.

Earlier, a federal district judge in Baltimore ruled that the university's Banneker Scholarships were legal after a Hispanic student, Daniel Podberesky, challenged the program as an unconstitutional set aside for black students. ■

DISTRICTS

Cincinnati Teacher-Transfer Policy May Consider Race, Court Rules

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit has ruled that the rights of Cincinnati teachers are not being violated by a district policy that takes race into account in deciding teacher transfers.

The policy "is substantially related to an important government objective" in that it is designed to keep the faculties of the city's schools racially balanced, the court said in a recent decision.

Although the policy allows the Cincinnati Board of Education to consider race in determining teacher assignments, it affects black and white teachers equally and, thus, cannot be seen as establishing racial preferences, the three-judge circuit-court panel said in upholding a decision by a federal district court.

The Cincinnati Federation of Teachers had brought suit alleging that its members suffered racial discrimination under a teacher-assignment policy that requires the racial composition of each school's faculty to be within 5 percent of the district average.

The board adopted the assignment policy in 1974 in response to a school-desegregation suit and preserved it even after being released last year from a voluntary consent decree authorizing federal court oversight of its desegregation efforts.

■ **Teachers in Fairfax County, Va., have threatened to launch a nationwide adverse-publicity campaign against the county to protest cuts made by county supervisors to the school budget.**

The Fairfax Education Association last week said it is considering placing advertisements in *The Wall Street Journal* and a number of local newspapers this week, urging businesses to think twice about moving to the county.

The county's economic-development authority has run ads in *The Journal*, *Fortune Magazine*, and other business publications touting the high quality of its schools. The budget approved last week by the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors doubled the allotment for similar advertising designed to attract new businesses. After meeting with county officials, union leaders said they would temporarily postpone acting on their threat, but they have an ad ready to run at short notice.

"Fairfax County public schools *were* among the best in the nation," the union's ad says, "but that can no longer be said. . . . Before you move your company to Fairfax County, be sure to come in and look around. You may not like what you find."

Faced with a $90-million deficit for the next fiscal year, the Fairfax supervisors cut $25 million out of the schools' budget and froze teachers' salaries—including seniority increases—for the second year in a row.

The Fairfax teachers' union, meanwhile, has also joined a coalition of county employee groups that are calling on their members to boycott local restaurants. The employee groups are targeting the leaders of a vigorous campaign by restaurant owners to defeat a proposed 4 percent meals tax. Receipts from the proposed tax, which county voters decisively rejected earlier this month, would have helped limit the amount of money cut from the schools' budget.

■ **The Lee County, Fla., school board voted last week to establish a booth where students can be tested for the virus that causes AIDS at a high-school health fair next month.**

By a unanimous vote, the board said that the Lee County AIDS Task Force and the local health department can provide confidential testing for the human immunodeficiency virus to students who are at least 18 years old at the health fair.

Students will make appointments in advance with the school nurse to be tested in the auditorium, and will be given counseling both before the test and after the results are in, said Elizabeth Harmon, the district's administrator of comprehensive school health and drug-free schools.

If the board is satisfied with the program, testing may be expanded to health fairs at all seven district high schools next year, she said.

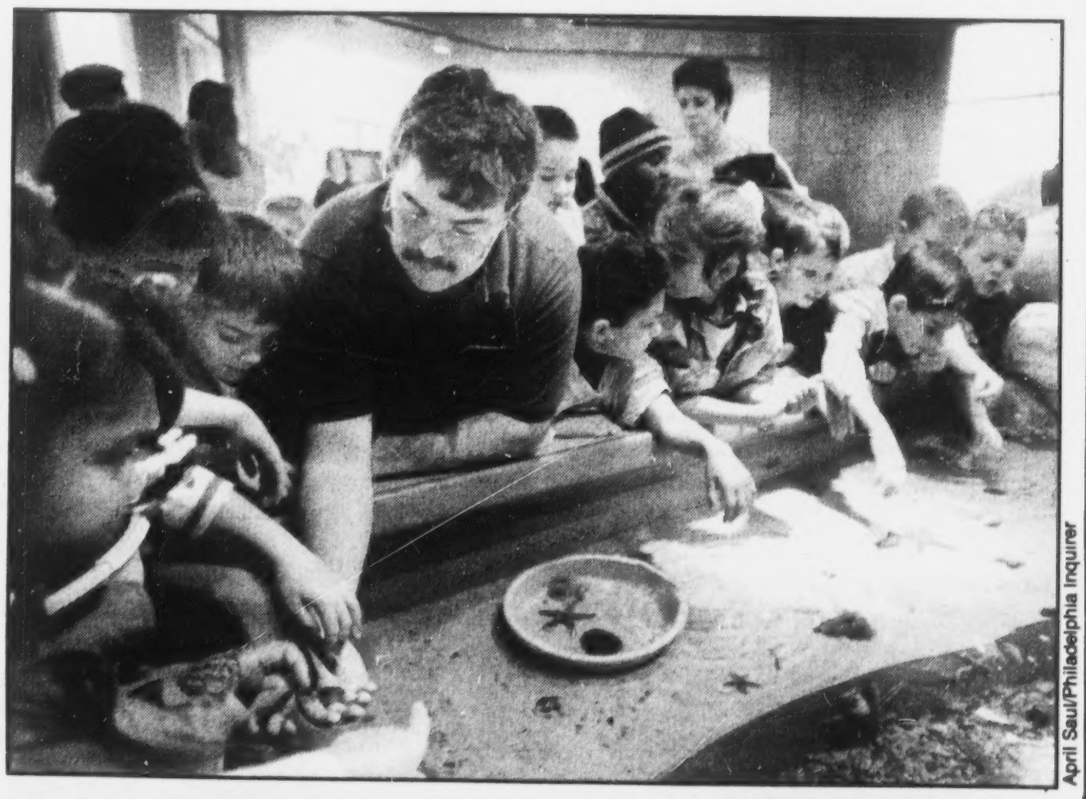
According to the Center for Population Options, 35 school-based and school-linked health clinics, most in large urban areas, provide H.I.V. testing to adolescents.

■ **The owner of a day-care center in Farmville, N.C., was convicted last week on 99 of 100 charges of sexually abusing 12 children enrolled there.**

After two weeks of deliberations, a Pitt County Superior Court jury found Robert F. Kelly Jr. guilty on 4 counts of rape, 46 of taking indecent liberties, 36 of first-degree sexual offenses, and 13 of crimes against nature.

The trial of Mr. Kelly, who had operated the Little Rascals day-care center, lasted eight months and cost taxpayers an estimated $1.2 million. The duration and cost drew comparisons to the McMartin Pre-

Close Encounters



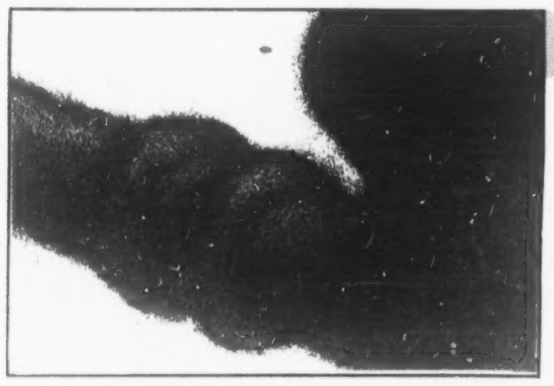
April Saul/Philadelphia Inquirer

Jack Carr, the public-programs director at the New Jersey State Aquarium in Camden, shows a group of students from Gloucester Township (N.J.) School starfish, sand dollars, and snails in the new facility's "petting zoo."

Boards of Contention

The Embodiment of Democracy, School Boards Come Under Attack as Defenders Of the Status Quo

An Education Week Special Report



Boards of Contention

INTRODUCTION

The Embodiment of Democracy, School Boards Come Under Attack as Defenders of the Status Quo

By Lynn Olson and Ann Bradley

Last July, Massachusetts abolished the nation's first elected school board.

After more than 200 years, Gov. William F. Weld replaced the popularly elected Boston School Committee with one appointed by the mayor.

"The citizens of Boston will be disenfranchised by this legislation," Governor Weld acknowledged at the time. But, he said, Boston's schools are "in desperate need of fundamental change."

Rarely in American history have school boards been under such attack.

Today, a combination of forces—ranging from ever-increasing state mandates to fast-changing demographics—has come together to threaten an institution once considered synonymous with public education in the United States.

In districts throughout the country, radical governance ideas are taking hold. Parents can now choose from among public schools; schools have been empowered to decide whom to hire and how to spend their money; and the operation of entire school districts has been delegated to private management firms.

As the educational landscape shifts, most agree that the roles and responsibilities of school boards cannot possibly remain static.

While some think the existing system of local lay governance of education is still viable, increasingly vocal critics are calling for major changes. Some would even scrap it for an entirely revamped infrastructure.

'Superfluous Institutions'?

"Local school boards are not just superfluous; they are also dysfunctional," Chester E. Finn Jr., a professor of education and public policy at Vanderbilt University, has written, expressing one of the strongest views on the subject.

"At a time when radical alterations are needed throughout elementary-secondary education," he argues, "school boards have become defenders of the status quo."

Far from contributing to education reform, adherents to Mr. Finn's line of reasoning contend, school boards have become part of the problem: mired in minutiae, prone to meddling, resistant to change, and victims of public apathy toward elected government in general.

"I think a lot of school boards are taken in by the bureaucracy and fed the kind of information that would please them," says Herbert J. Walberg, a professor of education at the University of Illinois at Chicago, who recently edited a book on school boards. "And since many of them are essentially amateurs and only stay on the board for two or three years, it's a way that the education establishment maintains the status quo."

Mandates From Above

Whether one shares such critics' views or not, school boards clearly are caught in the crossfire of rapidly changing ideas about who should control public education in America.

The 1980's witnessed an unprecedented growth in state control of education, as one state after another passed comprehensive reform laws dealing with everything from who should teach to the content of the curriculum.

State financing for public education is also approaching local expenditures for the first time in history. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the state share of K-12 schooling is now 46.4 percent; the local share is 47.6 percent.

In the midst of such changes, local school boards have been largely left out of the debate.

"Local boards never, ever caught the big picture of what needs to be done in public education," says Howard M. O'Cull, the executive director of the West Virginia School Boards Association, "and because they haven't, states simply moved the policy arena to the state capital."

By 1986, a national poll of school-board members revealed high levels of anxiety about the intrusiveness of state policymaking into local affairs.

The potential creation of national standards and assessments in education could undermine local control still further.

Threats From Below

Hemmed in by mandates from above, boards have also found themselves challenged from below.

If schools are empowered to make decisions about everything from budgets to curricula—as many reformers now advocate—then boards of education cannot continue to exercise the same kind of direct management they have in the past.

The rapid growth of parental-choice plans that enable youngsters to attend schools outside the district in which they live has also threatened the sovereignty of school boards.

Finally, the competing demands on boards from a host of special-interest groups have resulted in what some observers describe as "policy gridlock," in which boards cannot possibly satisfy all parties.

Today, argues Michael W. Kirst, a professor of education at Stanford University, education is being pushed and pulled by a "fragmented, elevated oligopoly" in which no one group has central control of the schools.

Although every state but Hawaii delegates substantial authority to local boards of education, critics charge that their role is becoming increasingly irrelevant.

A 'Vast Wasteland'

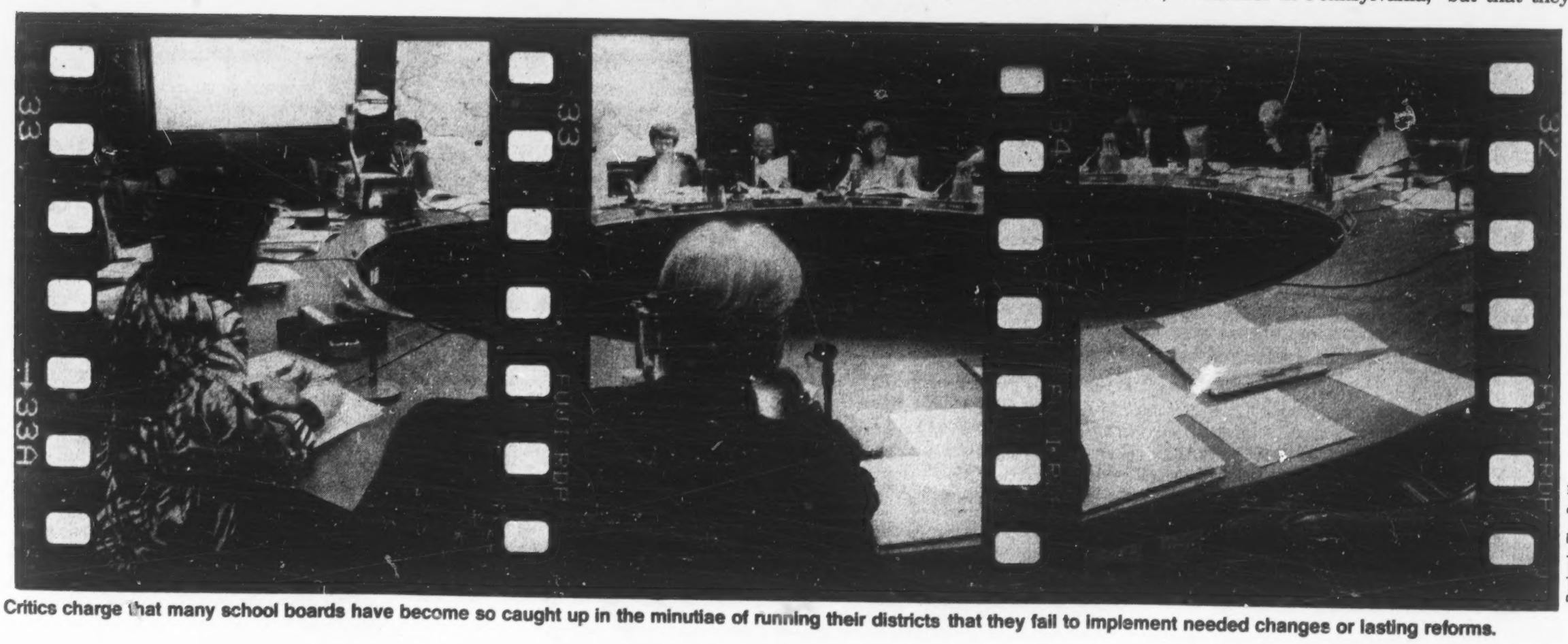
Worse yet is the sense that school boards have lost their internal compass: that clarity of vision and purpose needed to steer an organization.

John Carver, an expert on private and nonprofit boards, describes local lay governance of education as a "vast wasteland."

Even if board members received the best training and acquired the discipline to fulfill their roles as defined by conventional wisdom, he argues, "they would simply have learned to do the wrong things better than before."

As most currently operate, Mr. Carver and others assert, school boards are collections of misguided talent that have the potential to accomplish far more for children than they do.

"It's not that many people see school boards as being damaging to the system," says Sharon Brumbaugh, a former board member in Pennsylvania, "but that they



Benjamin Tice Smith

Critics charge that many school boards have become so caught up in the minutiae of running their districts that they fail to implement needed changes or lasting reforms.

are not using the powers they have to bring about change in the system."

Amazing Diversity

With 97,000 members on more than 15,000 public-school boards in the United States, it is hard to generalize about their functioning. The diversity is astounding.

They range from the seven-member New York City Board of Education, whose system has more students than there are residents in the state of Rhode Island, to the five-member school board in Big Cabin, Okla., whose entire 58-student population could fit into a few New York City classrooms.

In 1990-91, 54 percent of the nation's school districts enrolled fewer than 1,000 students each. But 4 percent had enrollments exceeding 10,000—accounting for nearly half of all students nationwide.

"The danger," Theodore R. Sizer, a professor of education at Brown University, cautions, "would be for policymakers to generalize about anything as diverse as school boards and, on the basis of that generalization, suggest policy."

The Urban Crisis

Most of the national media attention paid to school boards in the past couple of years has focused on the turmoil and dissension on big-city boards of education.

In 1990, 20 of the 25 superintendencies in the largest urban districts were vacant. And media accounts blamed the problem, at least in part, on the personal agendas, daily meddling, and inappropriate behavior of board members.

"Constructive board-superintendent relationships have collapsed almost entirely in many large cities," contends a report on school boards released this month by the Twentieth Century Fund and the Danforth Foundation. *(See Education Week, April 8, 1992.)*

Most big-city superintendents now last less than three years on the job.

Others attribute the turnover to the dwindling size and quality of the selection pool from which urban executives are chosen. They argue that some tension between school boards and their chief executive officers is inevitable, since lay boards must rely on these professionals for most of their information. When board members show any inclination to pursue data on their own, they are quickly accused of meddling. And the lack of trust on both sides can become explosive.

'Impossible' Task

In some cities, evidence of patronage and the sheer inability of school boards to deliver a solid education to their charges has led to unprecedented measures.

The Jersey City and Paterson districts were taken over by the state of New Jersey, and their existing school boards were disbanded. Boston University assumed operation of the Chelsea, Mass., schools.

And in Chicago, a coalition of advocacy groups pushed through a reform law that created popularly elected councils of citizens, parents, and teachers at each school, gave them the authority to choose principals and spend discretionary funds, and significantly curtailed the powers of the central board.

The vast size of many urban school systems—combined with the daunting social problems they face—has led some scholars to suggest they are simply ungovernable.

"It's not that board members are malevolent," says John E. Chubb, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. "It's that they're responsible for a task that is basically impossible."

A Common Problem

But the problems with school boards are

Continued on Page 5

Michael Ainsworth

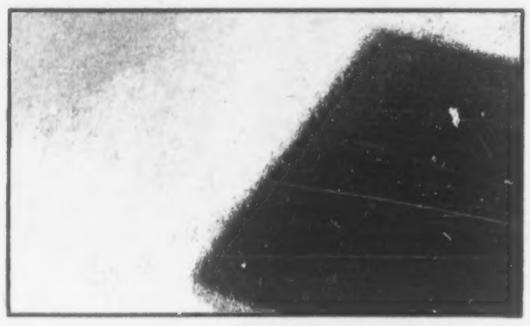
School-board members sometimes describe themselves as the "arm of the community." Trini Garza, center, a member of the board of trustees of the Dallas Independent School District, chats with members of the audience following a board meeting.

The Typical School-Board Member

Sex:	Male
Age:	41 to 50 Years
Race:	White
Marital Status:	Married
Children in School:	One or More
Education:	Advanced Degree
Occupation:	Professional or Managerial
Family Income:	$40,000 to $49,999
Home:	Homeowner
Community Type:	Suburban
School-System Enrollment:	1,000 to 4,999
Board Experience:	One to Five Years
Board Size:	Seven Members
Selection Method:	Elected

BASE: Random sample of 4,841 school-board members who subscribe to *The American School Board Journal*, of whom 1,306—or 27 percent—responded.

SOURCE: *School Board*-Virginia Tech Survey, 1991



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In serving the interests of boards, the N.S.B.A. and its state affiliates have not made reputations as reformers. 8

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Renewed attention is being focused on the pay, perquisites, and spending of school-board members. 10

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For William M. Soult, serving as a school-board member is a time-consuming commitment. 20

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In response to evidence of political patronage, Kentucky lawmakers stripped boards of many of their powers. 26

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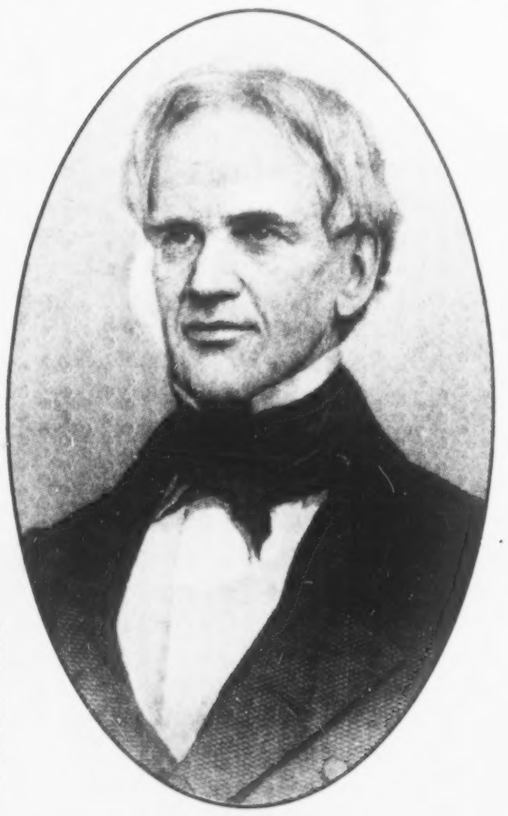

The Bettmann Archive

The Bettmann Archive

Reformers such as Horace Mann, above, and Samuel Gridley Howe, below, led a "crusade" to rationalize control over public education in the 1800's.

al reading, and more."

"These program specialists," he continues, ". . . have been insulated from the superintendent's influence by the requirements of the state and federal government. Their allegiance is often primarily to the higher levels of education governance, rather than to the local community. As a result, the influence of the superintendent and local school board has been diluted."

The Power of the State

The real challenge to the dominance of local school boards, however, came from the states.

Beginning in the 1970's, a large number of school-finance lawsuits led to more state spending on education—and more directives.

State activity burgeoned again in the 1980's with the excellence movement and the emergence of "education governors."

"One can cite a handful of exceptions (Rochester, Chelsea, Chicago) where the main impetus was local," says Chester E. Finn Jr., a professor of education and public policy at Vanderbilt University, "but these pale alongside such statewide reform efforts as those of Kentucky, South Carolina, California, New Jersey, and a dozen other jurisdictions."

Many of these state reform efforts bypassed school boards almost entirely, on the grounds that boards of education had not been sufficiently vigilant in guaranteeing children a high-quality education.

The influence of professional "education reformers," big business, and other interest groups also increased dramatically during this era.

"As a principle, local lay governance remains unchallenged," Mr. Kirst notes. "In fact, however, a change in governance has been taking place. Some observers even contend that the growing influence of centralizing forces—state and federal authorities, courts, national testing agencies, and nationwide interest groups—has made 'home rule' now more illusion than actuality."

Emboldened Teachers' Unions

At the same time as they faced challenges from the federal government and the states, school boards found their power threatened from below.

The first blows came in the 1960's from newly emboldened teachers' unions. The power of unions paralleled the growth of the American Federation of Teachers. Unlike the rival National Education Association, which fashioned itself a professional organization, the A.F.T. embraced the tools of trade unionism, such as strikes.

The United Federation of Teachers in New York City, formed in 1960, first walked out on strike in 1962.

As the A.F.T. became the bargaining agent in a growing number of cities, the number of strikes escalated rapidly. There were 2 strikes in 1965, 33 in 1966, and more than 80—including a bitter strike in New York City—in 1967.

Community Rights

The New York strike also highlighted the growing tensions between local communities—particularly those with large minority populations—and school boards, a situation that further emerged as a check on the boards' power.

In the wake of the strike, local communities demanded—and won—a greater say in school policy. New York City reverted to the 19th-century-style decentralized system, in which 32 local boards oversaw elementary and middle schools.

An even more dramatic example of decentralization occurred in Chicago, where, partly in response to a series of bitter teachers' strikes, the legislature designed a reformed school system in which local school councils, composed primarily of parents, would have authority over each of the city's schools.

But the Chicago reform, notes Mr. Finn, represents a far cry from the local control the 19th-century reformers agitated against. As in Dade County, Fla., and a host of other districts, the Chicago system meant divesting control to those at the school site, including the education professionals, leaving the city school board with little to do.

"If one set of the important decisions and duties moves up to the state (or even the nation), and another set shifts down to the individual school (and to parents)," Mr. Finn writes, "what is the 'local education agency' except another instance of middle management of the sort that most modern organizations are stripping away in the name of efficiency and productivity?" ■

School-Board Presidents' Attitudes About Public Schools

How about the public schools in the nation as a whole? What grade would you give the schools nationally—A,B,C,D,or Fail?

	All School-Board Presidents	Superintendents	General Public
	%	%	%
A	2	5	3
B	31	66	20
C	51	25	48
D	9	1	13
Fail	2	*	3
Don't Know	5	3	13

How about the public schools in your community? What grade would you give the public schools in your community—A,B,C,D, or Fail?

A	23	32	9
B	56	58	31
C	18	8	34
D	1	1	10
Fail	0	*	4
Don't Know	1	*	12

BASE: Random survey conducted by the National Center for Education Information from Nov. 15, 1988, to Feb. 10, 1989, of school-board presidents in 2,197 school districts, of whom 1,217 responded.

NOTE: * Less than 0.5 percent. Figures for superintendents are from a National Center for Education Information's survey of 1,704 superintendents, 1,349 public-school principals, and 524 private-school principals conducted between Oct. 20 and Dec. 20, 1987. Figures for the general public are from a Gallup Organization poll of 2,118 adults (18 years of age and older) conducted April 8-10, 1988, for the Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools.

SOURCE: Profile of School Board Presidents in the U.S., National Center for Education Information, 1989

School-Board Authority

Would you say your school board's authority has increased, stayed about the same, or decreased over the last five years?

	All School-Board Presidents	By Enrollment Size: 10,000 or More	2,500-9,999	Less Than 2,500
	%	%	%	%
Increased	20	21	17	20
Decreased	58	53	57	58
Stayed the Same	22	26	27	21

If decreased, who now has the authority your school board had?

Superintendent	9	7	10	9
Principal	*	0	1	0
Teachers	6	2	7	6
Parents	0	0	0	0
State	89	92	86	89
Federal	6	8	7	6

Do you think the authority of your school board should be greater, about the same, or less than it is?

Greater	35	39	37	34
About the Same	63	59	64	64
Less	2	2	1	2

BASE: Random survey conducted by the National Center for Education Information from Nov. 15, 1988, to Feb. 10, 1989, of school-board presidents in 2,197 school districts, of whom 1,217 responded.

NOTE: * Less than 0.5 percent.

SOURCE: Profile of School Board Presidents in the U.S., National Center for Education Information, 1989

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not limited to urban areas.

Governance changes in the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990 were directed primarily at the nepotism and political agendas that characterized the state's overwhelmingly rural boards of education.

And many of the nation's suburban school boards are struggling with the same societal dilemmas as their urban neighbors: a growing population of students from racial, ethnic, and language minorities; a rising incidence of drug, alcohol, and sexual abuse; and a split and fractious community.

In many parts of rural and small-town America, however, the perception remains that school boards still work. In these relatively homogeneous communities, where most people know their board members personally, the sense of crisis is far removed.

"I'm just as happy as I can be when I go back to the Dakotas that the school board is as it's always been," says William H. Kolberg, the president of the National Alliance of Business and a vocal critic of urban boards of education.

Complacency an Issue

But it is precisely the self-satisfaction of some of these suburban, rural, and small-town school boards that worries other observers.

"The biggest problem in some of [these] districts is the complacency about the quality of the educational policies they have," Mr. Kirst of Stanford says.

In a 1989 survey of 1,217 school-board presidents across the United States, the vast majority gave low marks to American public education as a whole. But four out of five awarded grades of A or B to the public schools in their own communities.

Presidents in small districts and rural areas gave lower ratings to a variety of reform proposals than did their peers in urban and suburban areas.

"If our criteria are a need for risk-taking, moving away from the status quo, educating the public to understand that reform does not mean going back to what we think worked yesterday," says Jacqueline P. Danzberger, an expert on school boards at the Institute for Educational Leadership, "then I think that you find the problem in a lot of kinds of communities."

'No Substantiation'

Despite such charges, there have been few systemic studies of school boards.

Thomas A. Shannon, the executive director of the National School Boards Association, says "there is absolutely no substantiation" that public-school boards have stood in the way of reform. "That sort of statement is 'scapegoatism' at its ultimate."

And Susan Fuhrman, the director of the Center for Policy Research at Rutgers University, says, "I think there are many boards, maybe even a majority of boards, that function the way one would advise them to function, and that is to set general

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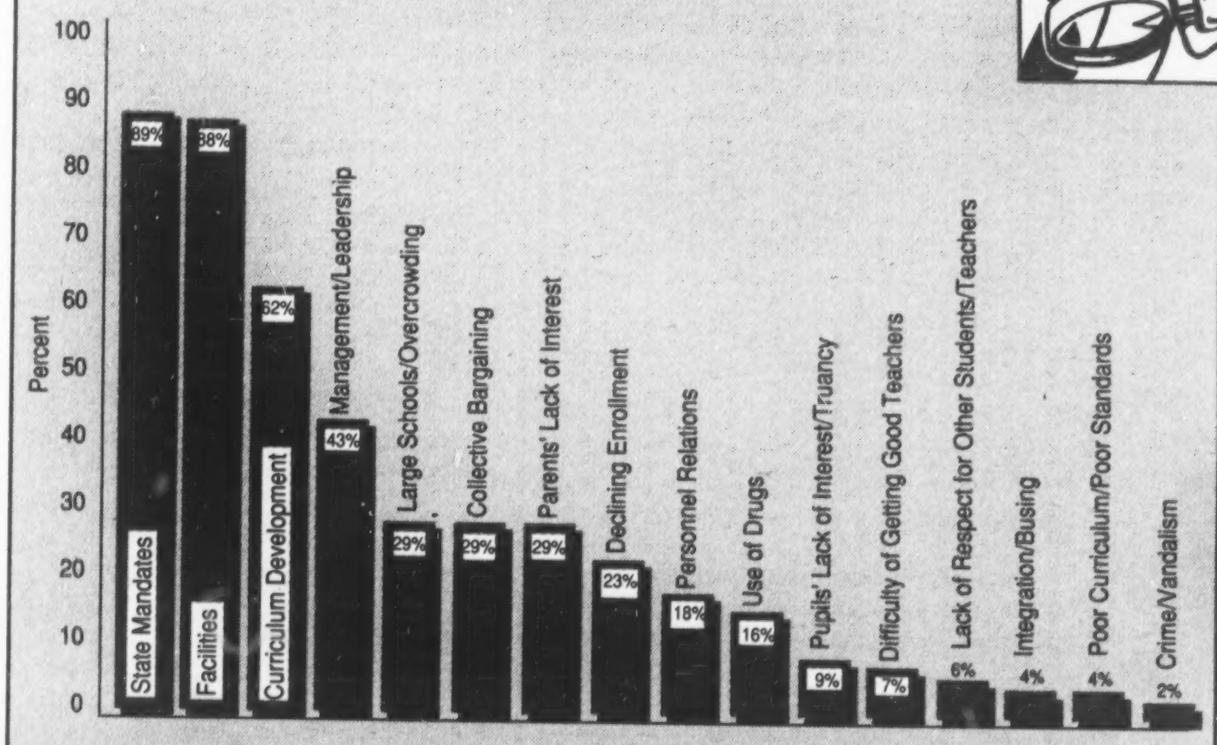
School Boards at a Glance

There have been few systematic studies of local school boards. But the following charts, bar graphs, and tables—based on some of the best data available—shed some light on who serves, their political leanings, the time they devote to their jobs, the decisions they make, their list of top concerns, and how they assess their own performance.

Top Concerns of School-Board Members



BASE: Random sample of 4,841 school-board members who subscribe to *The American School Board Journal*, of whom 1,306—or 27 percent—responded.

NOTE: Respondents to survey were asked to indicate their top three concerns from among those listed. The totals represent the percentage of respondents who checked that concern as one of their top three. The percentages total more than 100 because of multiple responses.

SOURCE: *School Board*-Virginia Tech Survey, 1991

National Demographics of School-Board Members, 1991

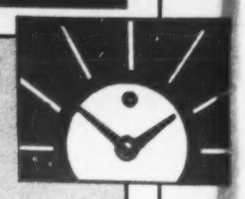
Sex	Male	65.3
	Female	34.7
Race	Black	2.2
	White	96.5
	Hispanic	0.8
	American Indian	0.3
	Oriental	0.1
Age	25 or Less	0.4
	26-35	5.6
	36-40	15.8
	41-50	45.6
	51-60	18.8
	Over 60	13.3
Family Income	Under $20,000	1.7
	$20,000-29,999	6.4
	$30,000-39,999	11.6
	$40,000-49,999	14.9
	$50,000-59,999	13.7
	$60,000-69,999	10.9
	$70,000-79,999	9.4
	$80,000-89,999	7.7
	$90,000-99,999	4.6
	$100,000-149,999	9.6
	$150,000 or Higher	6.6

BASE: Random sample of 4,041 school-board members who subscribe to *The American School Board Journal*, of whom 1,306—or 27 percent—responded.

NOTE: Includes 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the Virgin Islands. Some percentages do not total 100 because of rounding.

SOURCE: *School Board*-Virginia Tech Survey, 1991

Hours Spent on School-Board Activities



On average, how many hours per week would you say you spend on school-board activities?

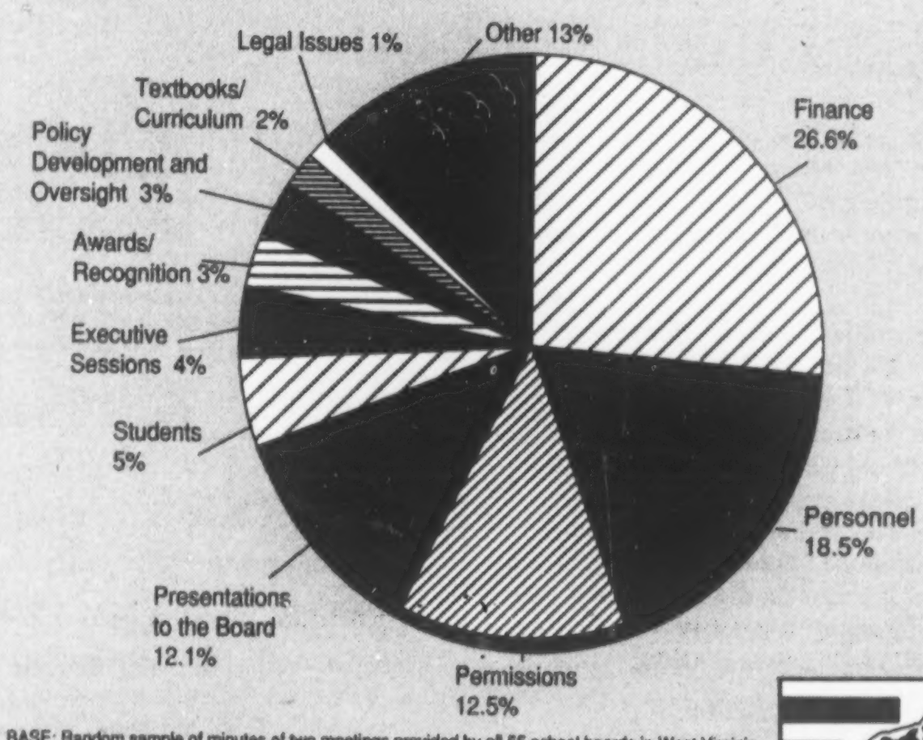
Hours	%	%	%	%
	All School-Board Presidents	10,000 or More	2,500-9,999	Less Than 2,500
	By Enrollment Size			
1-2	18	3	7	22
3-4	25	8	23	27
5-6	22	14	18	24
7-9	11	12	16	9
10-14	13	27	22	10
15-19	5	13	7	3
20-24	4	13	6	3
25-29	1	4	2	1
30-34	*	4	*	0
35-39	*	1	*	0
40+	*	3	0	*

BASE: Random survey conducted by the National Center for Education Information from Nov. 15, 1988, to Feb. 10, 1989, of school-board presidents in 2,197 school districts, of whom 1,217 responded.

NOTE: * Less than 0.5 percent.

SOURCE: Profile of School Board Presidents in the U.S., National Center for Education Information, 1989

Categories of Decisions

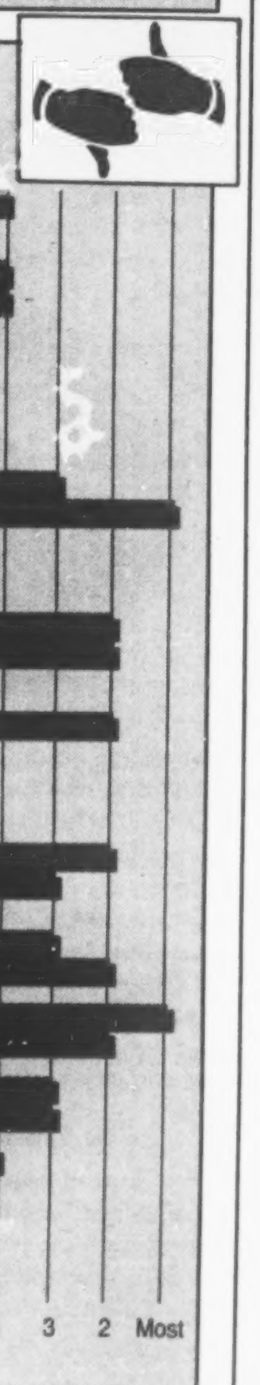


BASE: Random sample of minutes of two meetings provided by all 55 school boards in West Virginia.

NOTE: Percentages do not total 100 because of rounding.

SOURCE: An Analysis of the Actions and Decisions Made in West Virginia Local School-Board Meetings Between 1985 and 1990, Jane E. Hange and Paul A. Leary, 1991

How Boards Rate Their Effectiveness



BASE: Sample of 266 school boards from 16 states that voluntarily participated in self-assessment exercises between 1988 and 1990 as part of training programs offered by the Institute for Educational Leadership.

NOTE: Members of each board were asked to rate their school board's effectiveness in 15 areas. Within each area, board members rated the effectiveness of their board on anywhere from 8-14 specific assessment items. The individual board members' ratings were then compiled to produce a composite report for a board.

SOURCE: The Institute for Educational Leadership, 1992

Political Orientation of School-Board Presidents

How would you describe your views on most political matters? Generally, do you think of yourself as liberal, moderate, or conservative?

	All School-Board Presidents	National Totals	School-Board Presidents By Enrollment Size: 10,000 or More	2,500-9,999	Less Than 2,500
	%	%	%	%	%
Liberal	10	23	15	12	9
Moderate	52	37	58	56	51
Conservative	38	34	27	34	40
Don't Know	—	6	—	—	—

BASE: Random survey conducted by the National Center for Education Information from Nov. 15, 1988, to Feb. 10, 1989, of school-board presidents in 2,197 school districts, of whom 1,217 responded.

NOTE: National totals are from a CBS poll of 1,553 adults conducted Jan. 12-15, 1989.

SOURCE: Profile of School Board Presidents in the U.S., National Center for Education Information, 1989

Illustrations by Francis Washington

New Jersey Newsphotos

According to one survey, 3 percent of a board's time is spent on awards ceremonies. Here, members of the Parsippany-Troy Hills (N.J.) Township Board of Education look on as Christine Caprio, a mathematics teacher, receives a faculty award.

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policy and delegate a great deal to the central administration."

'Staff Member' Once Removed

But if school boards are supposed to focus on broad educational issues, they devote a surprising amount of time to detail.

Critics charge that many boards have become so hopelessly enmeshed in the minutiae of running their districts that they fail to see the forest for the trees.

A study of board minutes from all 55 school systems in West Virginia between 1985 and 1990 found that boards spent only 3 percent of their time on decisions related to policy development and oversight.

At least 54 percent was spent on administrative matters, according to Mr. Carver, who has been advising the state's legislature on governance issues. At most, 42 percent was spent on decisions that could legitimately be called "governance."

"There is no reason to expect the West Virginia data to differ substantially from that which would be obtained elsewhere in the country," Mr. Carver writes. "Recent articles in the literature suggest that the same disease afflicts all."

Mr. Carver argues that boards have become a "staff member one step removed," rather than the policymakers they claim to be. "The fact that you can't hire a janitor or a teacher without a board taking action is ludicrous," he says.

'Micro-Management' a Problem

The report by the Twentieth Century Fund cites the "tendency for most boards to 'micro-manage' " as the biggest problem they face.

A curriculum audit of the District of Columbia schools last fall found that board members made 181 written requests for information in 1991—many of them "frivolous."

Another indication of how bogged down boards can become in trivia is the number of times they meet. The Tucson, Ariz., school board met 172 times in one year. In such instances, superintendents spend most of their time servicing the board.

"If boards continue to involve themselves in some of the day-to-day things that should be left to the administration," warns Edward Garner, the former president of the Denver Board of Education, "I don't think boards as we know them today will exist in the future."

'Serious Trouble'

The tendency of boards to become immersed in fine print has also blurred the distinction between policy and administration and led to repeated charges of "meddling."

In Seattle, recalls Reese Lindquist, the president of the local teachers' union, one board member decided to take the school system's budget home and analyze it in detail.

"It was so large, she had to get a custodian to help carry it to her car," he laughs. "Any school-board member who thinks that's their responsibility is in serious trouble."

Other observers charge that the focus on minutiae discourages corporate executives, university presidents, and other prominent citizens from serving on school boards.

"If a body is legally responsible for everything that goes on in a school district, and if the majority of people who come on a board do not have strong, broad, and deep leadership backgrounds," Ms. Danzberger of the I.E.L. says, "then the tendency is to get into everything."

'Dictated by the State'

In fairness to boards of education, much of the trivia on their agendas derives from state mandates.

West Virginia requires local boards to approve all student field trips. The California education code requires them to approve all student expulsions.

"My own experience is that our board meetings are dictated almost entirely by the state," says Ms. Fuhrman, who recently completed a term as a public-school board member in New Jersey.

Such dictates, she adds, take time away from discussions about education and prevent boards from focusing on long-range planning.

"We don't have the freedom to spend as much time discussing education issues as I would like to," laments Leslie Q. Giering, an 18-year board member in the 1,100-student Bloomfield Central School District in New York State.

"When I was first elected, we met once a month," she says. "Then we began having two meetings a month, with the idea of discussing education at the second. But we find that other things take up our time."

A Contradiction

In fact, if most citizens attended an average school-board meeting, they would probably be underwhelmed by its content. But few bother.

Turnouts in school-board elections typically hover between 10 percent and 15 percent of registered voters. And most board meetings are sparsely attended.

Such visible citizen apathy about a purportedly valued institution bodes ill for the future.

If school boards "embody everything that everybody says they love and want in citizen-based control of a major institution," notes Neil R. Peirce, a political writer, "why is it that scarcely any of us bother to vote for any of the people who sit on these committees?"

Board watchers also describe a steady decline in the number and quality of people willing to run for election. According to Ms. Danzberger, about one-third of board members turn over each year. And it is getting harder and harder to replace them.

The most noticeable drop has been

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Local boards never, ever caught the big picture of what needs to be done in public education.

– Howard M. O'Cull
W.Va. School Boards Association

The fact that you can't hire a janitor or a teacher without a board taking action is ludicrous.

– John Carver
Governance consultant

If boards continue to involve themselves in . . . administration, I don't think [they] will exist in the future.

– Edward Garner
Former board president

They are not using the powers they have to bring about change in the system.

– Sharon Brumbaugh
Former board member

cooperatively working with groups rather than by being hostile," explains John J. Woods, the executive director of the Monroe association.

Mr. Grumet says the coalition was not important, accomplished little, and barred some education groups.

The criticism from Monroe County, he says, is caused by the frustration of people "who like to think of themselves as educators rather than politicians."

That posture is doomed in the current political climate, he says.

"We're only obstructionist in the sense that we didn't do what [others] wanted," Mr. Grumet says.

Advocates for Change

The North Carolina School Boards Association, which is widely regarded as a leader in the state's efforts to improve its schools, stands in marked contrast to the New York association.

> We are to board members what the bar association is to lawyers, what the medical association is to doctors, what the bankers' association is to bankers. We function as a trade association.
>
> **– T.E. (Ted) Davidson**
> *Iowa Association of School Boards*

It was the North Carolina School Boards Association that proposed a strong state receivership for academically bankrupt districts. It was the school-boards association that supported site-based decisionmaking. And it is the association's executive director, Gene Causby, who has traveled the state drumming up support for strong measures of accountability.

"This is not a group that I would have expected this from when [reform] began," observes John Dornan, the president of the Public School Forum of North Carolina. "Had it not been for the [N.C.S.B.A.], I don't think the state would have gone as far as it did."

Mr. Dornan's views are shared by many others in the state, including G. Thomas Houlihan, the superintendent of the Johnston County schools.

"The bottom line in North Carolina is, the officers in the school-boards association do not fall into the typical good-old-boy system," he says. "There are many, many outspoken advocates for change."

"Their example has given local boards the impetus and the courage to try some things that perhaps they would not be willing to try to do," Mr. Houlihan adds.

While advocating reform, the North Carolina association has not neglected its constituents' needs, school-board members say.

"If our local board felt we needed a specific session on a new law, we could call them up, and they would put together the resources and help us set up training sessions," says Clarence Lemons, a board member in Granville County.

Unlike some teachers'-union leaders, who have acknowledged dragging their constituents along the road to reform, Mr. Causby says his members were ready.

"We had a choice," he explains. "We could continue to react to change, or we could attempt to shape change. I like to think we chose the latter."

Training and Publications

In addition to lobbying, the school-boards associations provide a variety of services to their members.

Among the most important, association directors say, are the training sessions they offer to board members.

"I would say the future of school-boards associations is going to rest largely on our ability to help board members understand what they are to do and how they do it," Mr. Davidson of the Iowa association says.

"Failing to do that," he says, "somewhere down the road, at some time, school boards may be looked upon as being archaic and useless."

School districts foot the bill for membership in the associations, while the N.S.B.A. makes most of its money from its annual convention.

In New York State, membership dues cover 54 percent of the association's $4-million budget. Current dues range from $550 to $5,900, depending on the size of a district's budget.

State associations put out a broad range of publications and special reports to keep their members abreast of legislation, legal opinions, and other school-related issues. California's school-boards association, for example, recently published a 75-page report outlining ways for schools to meet the national education goals.

The associations also conduct research, such as a report recently released by the N.S.B.A. examining the segregation of Hispanic students in schools.

Members also have access to a range of legal services.

Each month, the *Connecticut Association of Boards of Education Journal* reports on bungling by the hypothetical Nutmeg Board of Education and outlines the approach the board should have taken.

The N.Y.S.S.B.A., meanwhile, boasts that it filed more friend-of-the-court briefs in 1990-91 than any other membership organization in the state.

'All Things to All People'

While the associations in New York State and North Carolina have earned distinct reputations, most state organizations fall somewhere in between.

The Iowa Association of School Boards, for example, is seen as a partner, if not a leader, by educators and business people in that state.

"They are trying to be all things to all people, and that creates some difficulty for them," says Gary Wegenke, the superintendent of schools in Des Moines.

Some of the state's school boards are "very progressive," notes Jamie Robert Vollmer, the director of operations for the Iowa Business and Education Roundtable. "Others, I have seen argue over the color paint on the boys' locker room."

The composition of the association is one reason it has not taken a stronger leadership role, observers say.

"Usually, you do not wind up getting people who want to lead the charge," Mr. Vollmer says, "because they have to be true to those people who pay their dues. I think that is probably good internal politics on their part. If they lead, it would be professional suicide." ■

Perceptions of Time Spent on School-Board Activities

There is much talk about the many things school boards have to deal with and how they spend their time in light of all they have to do. Do you think your school board spends too much, too little, or about the right amount of time on each of the following?

	All School-Board Presidents		
	Too Much	Too Little	Right Amount
Making Personnel Decisions	4	11	84
Selecting/Adopting School Curricula	1	45	53
Selecting/Adopting Textbooks	—	37	57
Determining School-District Budgets	8	18	74
Student Disciplinary Actions	5	6	85
Due-Process Hearings for Personnel	8	3	83
Due-Process Hearings for Students	4	4	86
Ceremonial/Ritualistic/Awards/ Recognition Activities	4	30	62
Negotiating/Bargaining With Teacher Groups	30	5	62
Meeting/Conferring With Teacher Groups	4	36	55
Bargaining With Groups That Represent Employees Other Than Teachers in the System	12	9	70
Interacting With Other Local Government Bodies	1	48	47
Discussions With Superintendent Outside of School-Board Meetings	2	22	76
Building-Maintenance Concerns	9	13	77
National/State Education Issues	2	48	47
Student Test Scores/Achievement Measures	2	30	67
Discussing Changing Student Population/ Demographics	1	36	58

BASE: Random survey conducted by the National Center for Education Information from Nov. 15, 1988, to Feb. 10, 1989, of school-board presidents in 2,197 school districts, of whom 1,217 responded.

SOURCE: Profile of School Board Presidents in the U.S., National Center for Education Information, 1989

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among corporate executives willing to devote energy to board business.

Ward Politics

In large cities, the practice of electing board members from discrete electoral districts—rather than from the city as a whole—has helped increase the representation of minority populations.

But it has also encouraged board members to focus on neighborhood constituencies and on narrow interests, rather than on the system as a whole. In some instances, critics charge, boards function more as neighborhood employment agencies than as service providers.

A 1986 study by the Institute for Educational Leadership found that board members elected by subdistrict were subjected to greater constituent pressure and voted more frequently in response to specific interest groups than did members who were elected at large.

'No Satisfactory Answer'

The rise of special-interest politics and the number of socially explosive issues that boards face have further impaired their functioning.

"School boards face a whole set of controversial decisions for which there is no satisfactory answer for at least half of the citizens," says Denis P. Doyle, a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute, an Indianapolis-based think tank. "Abortion and drugs and condom distribution and AIDS and alcohol and sex abuse and poor academic standards—the list is daunting. And school boards, understandably, feel some compulsion to try to step up to the plate and hit the ball. But it has produced a really dysfunctional system in many large cities."

In essence, critics assert, some boards have confused representation of the public with the public interest.

"What we've really created," says Phillip C. Schlechty, the president of the Center for Leadership in School Reform in Louisville, Ky., "is a situation in which the board thinks its job is to be responsive to the community."

"Its job," he continues, "is to be accountable to the community and responsive to parents and kids."

Structurally Isolated

Historically, school boards were made independent from local government to insulate education from the corrupting influence of politics. But critics argue that school boards in many instances have become conduits for political influence.

And in contemporary society, the separation is often a disadvantage.

Today, many families have health, social, and emotional problems that cannot be solved by the schools alone. Yet, the continued structural isolation of school boards has made it difficult to coordinate activities on behalf of youngsters and their families.

"School boards were not set up to deal

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In Cash-Strapped Districts, Board Spending Gets New Scrutiny

By Peter Schmidt

The financial crisis that many urban districts face has focused renewed attention on the pay, perquisites, and spending of school-board members.

In the District of Columbia, where the school board has been called the most expensive in the nation, the scrutiny has been particularly intense.

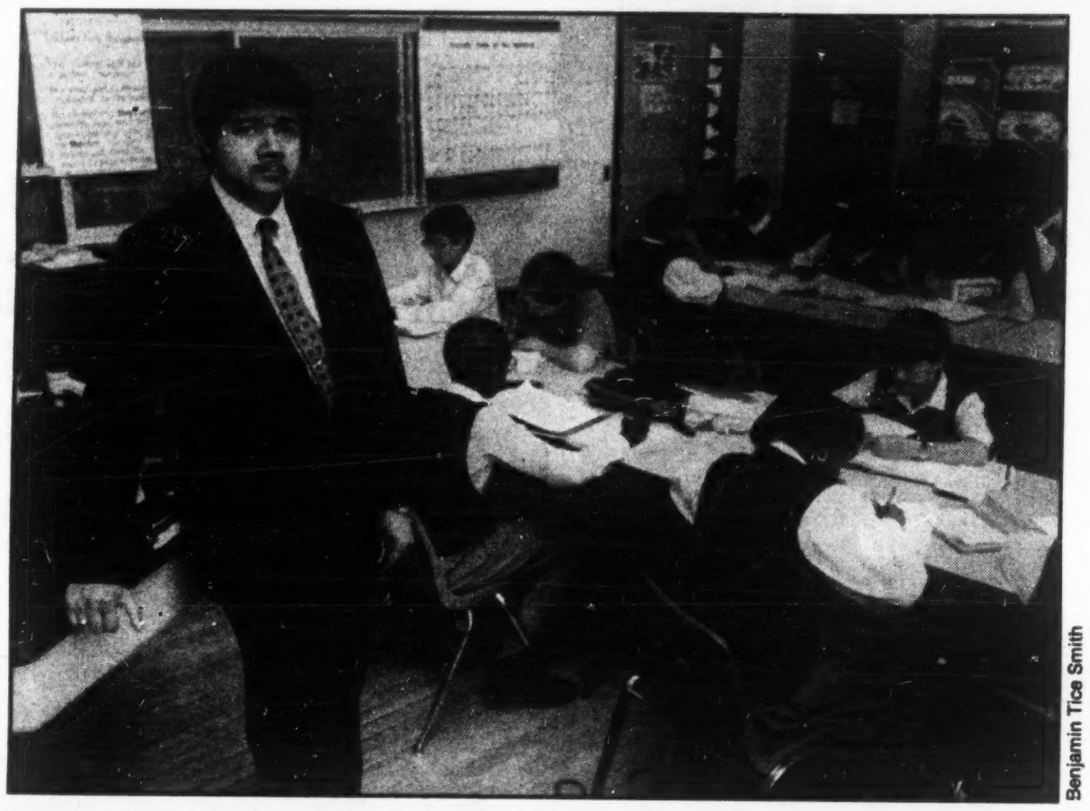
According to a 1990 report, the 11-member board employed approximately 35 staff members, including a full-time secretary and up to three assistants for each board member. In addition to an office at the central administrative building, each board member has a ward office. Further, although membership on the board is considered a part-time position, board members were paid $27,575 in 1990.

"The image that gets portrayed is of a board that seems to want to do everything 'Cadillac-style,'" says Jim E. Ford, who analyzes the budget of the Washington school board as the staff director of the city council's committee on education.

"Sometimes the question arises: What are we getting for it?" he says.

R. David Hall, the board's president, argues that the board "has done some considerable belt-tightening" and has been reduced to asking for private donations to cover some basic activities.

Members also struggle with "a pretty onerous workload," he says.



Benjamin Tice Smith

Critics call the District of Columbia school board the most expensive in the nation. R. David Hall, its president, says members have cut their spending.

$26,627 for Travel

Controversies over board spending have not been limited to big cities, however.

In Louisiana, the St. Tammany Parish school board touched off a furor recently when it sent all 15 members to conventions in distant cities. Last year, all of the board members attended the National School Boards Association's convention in San Francisco at a cost of $26,627.

The issue of board expenditures "is something that should be public," says Luvern L. Cunningham, an expert on school governance who has consulted with school boards for 25 years. "It requires examination on the part of the board periodically."

Mr. Cunningham notes that the perquisites of most school boards have been cut significantly in recent years. Recently, he says, they have been asked to cut back on some items—such as training retreats—that are "a very legitimate public expenditure."

In Washington, a government advisory commission concluded that there was significant fat in the board's budget. It recommended that the board cut its staff by 50 percent, immediately close all ward offices, and eliminate board members' salaries, effective this year.

Mr. Ford asserts that the board's annual budget is $1.8 million, including a $165,000 fund that can be used to pay for travel, and $132,000 in "discretionary funds" that can be used for such activities as constituent mailings.

Mr. Hall says the figures are wrong and reflect an unfamiliarity with how the board's money was spent. The board, he says, has a total budget of only $1.6 million, has "drastically" reduced its staff, and has cut its travel budget to $2,000 per member to be spent only on specified conferences.

"Our budget was so tight that, when our [new] superintendent came, we could not afford to give him a reception," Mr. Hall says. "What we had to do was raise the money privately through the sale of tickets at $12.50 each."

'Staying in Touch' With Schools

The issue of the board members' personal staff members has been particularly touchy.

While some people—such as Mr. Ford—say the staff aides do "very valuable" work analyzing budgets and subcommittee work for their members, others have charged that staff members primarily spend their time meddling in administration or politicking in their bosses' wards.

The members of the Los Angeles Unified School District Board of Education also have field employees. Richard K. Mason, the special counsel to the board, says the field aides, who are paid about $40,000 a year, help board members stay in touch with the schools in their wards, which may be long drives away from the central-board office.

Such a position proved to be a springboard to public office for Jeff Horton, a former field employee who was elected to the school board in 1991.

But Julie Korenstein, another board member, recently opted not to have a field aide, asserting that the money for the position was not well spent. Instead, she had the money spent on programs in the schools in her district.

Los Angeles board members are paid up to $24,000 a year, receive full health and medical benefits, can spend up to $7,000 a year for travel, and are given a district car, with expenses paid, for work-related travel.

Until 1986, members of the Detroit Board of Education had six chauffeurs to drive them to appointments and run errands. The practice ended after state legislators balked at the $250,000 annual cost of the perquisite.

While such frills may seem excessive—especially given the poverty from which many urban students hail—Mr. Cunningham says it is instructive to take a historical view of the situation.

Ten or 20 years ago, he points out, it was not unusual for members of urban school boards to be given cars, drivers, their own offices and secretaries, and sometimes even club memberships. The boards, all of whose members typically were white, came under little scrutiny for their spending, he says.

"When we shifted over to having African-Americans on boards," he says, "there was a lot of criticism of perks" and public pressure to reduce them.

"It was not fair to criticize minorities for enjoying perquisites that had been standard practice for whites over a number of years," Mr. Cunningham says. "There was obviously, among minority populations, a sense of discrimination when these kinds of changes occurred." ■

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with social services and linkages to outside agencies," notes Sandra Kessler Hamburg, the director of education studies at the Committee for Economic Development. "And, frankly, a lot of them just feel overwhelmed."

When school boards do try to meet their students' nonacademic needs, they can get burned.

Sue Cummings, the former chairman of the Roseville, Minn., school board, was turned out of office by voters in the conservative, heavily Catholic community outside the Twin Cities after she supported spending $10,000 of the district's money to help a health clinic locate in the town.

"It is so hard for me to describe the tenor of the community during that time," she says. "They went wild, they were so emotional. People who were my avid supporters called me and said the Catholic priest had condemned me to hell from the pulpit by name."

The reaction also stemmed, she says, from the community's refusal to acknowledge the circumstances of its children's lives, such as teenage pregnancy.

"People kept saying, 'No, no, no, this doesn't happen here,'" she recalls. "The statistics clearly show that these are not inner-city problems, that small towns in Minnesota have every bit the same problems."

The ability of 92 percent of public-school boards to raise taxes and spend money as they see fit has further strained the relationship between local boards of education and their municipalities.

Some mayors and town-council members charge that this fiscal independence has produced waste and inefficiency and decreased school boards' accountability to the public.

'Arm of the Community'

Despite such criticisms, few think that Americans will do away with school boards entirely.

The notion that local schools are the public's to run is deeply ingrained in the American psyche.

"The board really is the arm of the community," says Margaret Myers, a member of the Muscatine, Iowa, school board. "I truly believe, the longer I have been involved in this, that there is real value in this kind of openness, doing business in open meetings, so that everyone in the community has the opportunity, whether they take it or not, of knowing and understanding what is going on in their school district—which is funded by their tax dollars."

Without the help of school boards and their communities, adds Mr. Shannon of the N.S.B.A., real reform will not occur.

"School-board members are the gatekeepers of reality," he argues. "It's one thing to have a good idea. It's quite another to take it and put it in a form that works and that can be paid for."

The strain of meshing this view with recent ideas about reforming educational governance is what this *Education Week* special report is all about.

It is based on interviews with nearly 160 people across the United States, including almost four dozen public-school-board members.

To help zero in on the problems and realities confronting lay governance of public education in America, it tells a tale of two school boards—one urban, one suburban—in different parts of the country.

Dallas was selected because it epitomizes many of the criticisms heaped on urban boards of education. Last year, the state appointed a special "monitor" to help improve the board's functioning.

Parsippany-Troy Hills, N.J., was selected to examine the governance of education in a moderately sized, moderately well-functioning school district that is struggling with many of the same problems as school boards nationwide.

A third piece is based on the daily logs kept by a veteran board member in Longmont, Colo., to illuminate how board members actually spend their time.

Finally, the report explores the wide array of alternatives being proposed to revamp the existing system of lay governance: from minor modifications to massive restructuring.

The intent is less to apportion blame than to shed light on what one observer describes as the most "understudied, underdeveloped link" in educational governance. ■

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